

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HELSIN 00161 170932Z
ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: PINR, PINT, FI

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION REPORT SIX: POPULAR VOTING
GIVES KEKKONEN VICTORY; MARGIN LESS THAN EXPECTED

REF: HELSINKI 0137,

1. URHO K. KEKKONEN, PRESIDENT OF FINLAND SINCE 1956, WON
VICTORY BY A WIDE MARGIN IN THE JANUARY 15-16 POPULAR VOTE STAGE
OF FINLAND'S TWO-STEP PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SYSTEM. UNOFFICIAL
RESULTS GAVE KEKKONEN'S ELECTORS 82.3 PERCENT OF THE VOTES
CAST COMPARED TO A TOTAL OF 17.7 PERCENT FOR THE ELECTORS
OF HIS FOUR OPPONENTS. KEKKONEN RECEIVED 260 OF THE 300 ELECTORS
COMPARED TO 40 ELECTORS FOR HIS FOUR OPPONENTS. THUS KEKKONEN
IS ASSURED OF THE SUPPORT OF AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE
300 ELECTORS WHO WILL CHOSE THE NEW PRESIDENT ON FEBRUARY 15,
MAKING HIS SELECTION ON THAT DAY A MERE FORMALITY. THE NEW
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PRESIDENTIAL TERM COMMENCES MARCH 1.

2. SOME 69 PERCENT OF ELEGIBLE VOTERS IN FINLAND
PARTICIPATED IN THE ELECTION, SOMEWHAT MORE THAN THE
65 PERCENT PREDICTED BY THE FINAL GALLUP POLL; VOTER
PARTICIPATION WAS ESSENTIALLY AT THE SAME LEVEL AS IN
THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (1968) WHEN 70 PERCENT

OF THE VOTERS WENT TO THE POLLS. APPARENTLY, THE LAST MINUTE APPEALS BY KEKKONEN AND POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS HAD SOME SUCCESS IN GETTING OUT THE VOTE. WHILE KEKKONEN WAS SPARED THE EMBARRASSMENT OF A LOW VOTER TURNOUT, THE 17.7 PERCENT VOTE FOR HIS FOUR LIGHT-WEIGHT OPPONENTS WQS SOMEWHAT MORE THAN MOST OBSERVERS HAD EXPECTED.

3. OF THE FOUR OPPOSITION CANDIDATES, CHRISTIAN LEAGUE PARTY CHAIRMAN RAINO WESTERHOLM MADE THE STRONGEST SHOWING (8.8 PERCENT) FOLLOWED BY THE RURAL PARTY'S VENNAMO (4.7 PERCENT) AND UNITY PARTY'S HAIKALA (0.8 PERCENT). THE CHRISTIAN LEAGUE WAS THE CLEAR GAINER, MORE THAN DOUBLING THE SUPPORT IT ACHIEVED IN THE LAST PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, WHEN IT WON NONE SEATS.

4. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE CENTER PARTY, ALL OF THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES RAN BEHIND THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND FAILED TO EQUAL THEIR SHARES OF VOTES ACHIEVED IN RECENT ELECTIONS. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY SUFFERED THE SHARPEST LOSS OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT, AS HAD BEEN EXPECTED.

5. KEKKONEN'S PERFORMANCE, WHILE SOMEWHAT BELOW EXPECTATIONS, WAS NEVERTHELESS OVERWHELMING BY ANY DEMOCRATIC STANDARD. HAVING MADE THE ELECTION A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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"REFERENDUM" ON HIS CONDUCT OF FINLAND'S FOREIGN POLICY, KEKKONEN CAN NOW POINT TO THE OURTCOME AS A STRONG EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL SUPPORT. THE ELECTION RECONFIRMS KEKKONEN'S DOMINATION OF THE FINNISH POLITICAL SCENE AND MAINTAINS HIS POSITION AS UNCONTESTED FOREIGN POLICY LEADER; HIS CONTINUATION IN OFFICE ASSURES CONTINUITY IN FINNISH FOREIGN POLICY. WITH A NEW SIX-YEAR TERM BEGINNING MARCH 1, KEKKONEN WILL CLEARLY BE PRESIDNET OF FINLAND AS LONG AS HE IS PHYSICALLY ABLE, AND AT 77 HIS PHYSICAL CONDITION APPEARS GOOD.

RIDGWAY

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